

**Remarks at a Veterans Day  
Ceremony in Arlington, Virginia**  
*November 11, 2003*

Thank you all very much. Thank you for the warm welcome. Thank you, Secretary Principi, for doing a really fine job to represent our Nation's veterans. Members of the Cabinet, Members of the Congress, members of our military, veterans, Commander Berger, representatives of veterans organizations, and fellow Americans: Laura and I are proud to join all of you and citizens across our country as we honor the service of America's veterans.

We observe Veterans Day on an anniversary—not of a great battle or of the beginning of a war but of a day when war ended and our Nation was again at peace. Ever since the armistice of November the 11th, 1918, this has been a day to remember our debt to all who have worn the uniform of the United States.

Our veterans have borne the costs of America's wars and have stood watch over America's peace. And today, every veteran can be certain: The Nation you served and the people you defended are grateful.

Our Nation knows this national cemetery as the final resting place of those lost to the violence of war. Yet, most of the markers here stand over the graves of Americans who lived beyond their years of military service. On the hills of Arlington and in the daily lives of our country, veterans have a special place. We honor them all for their service in uniform. And we honor America's veterans for the full lives of their service they continue to lead.

Today, more than 25 million Americans wear the proud title of veteran or retired military. Their ranks include young men and women who gave good years to our all-volunteer military and recently returned to civilian life. Our veterans include more than 11 million men and women from the conflicts of Korea and Vietnam who earned this Nation's gratitude and respect. More than 4 million living Americans served in World War II, under the command of Eisenhower and Bradley and Nimitz. And on Veterans Day 2003, it is still possible to thank, in person, almost 200 Americans who were in uniform

when the guns of World War I went silent 85 years from today. All the men who served when Woodrow Wilson was the Commander in Chief are now more than 100 years old, and they can know that America is still proud of them.

Every veteran has his or her own story of entering military service. Many enlisted on Monday morning, December 8th, 1941, or at the beginning of other conflicts. For some, military life began with the initiation at an academy. For others, it began with a letter from the United States Government. Yet when their service is complete, veterans of every era, every background, and every branch have certain things in common. And those shared commitments and experience formed bonds that last a lifetime.

Every veteran has lived by a strict code of discipline. Every veteran understands the meaning of personal accountability and loyalty and shared sacrifice. From the moment you repeated the oath to the day of your honorable discharge, your time belonged to America; your country came before all else. And whether you served abroad or at home, you have shared in the responsibility of maintaining the finest fighting force in the world.

Veterans who took the oath and served in battle have known the hardships and the fears and the tragic losses of war. These memories follow them through life and are sometimes hard to bear. Yet our war veterans, wherever they fought, can know this: In the harshest hours of conflict, they serve just and honorable purposes.

Americans are a peaceful people, and this Nation has always gone to war reluctantly and always for a noble cause. America's war veterans have fought for the security of this Nation, for the safety of our friends, and for the peace of the world. They humbled tyrants and defended the innocent and liberated the oppressed. And across the Earth, you will find entire nations that once lived in fear, where men and women still tell of the day when Americans came and set them free.

America's mission in the world continues, and we count on the same kind of people to carry it out. Today, in assignments around the world, more than 1.4 million Americans are on active duty, earning the title of veteran by serving in the cause of freedom. In 2 years

and 2 months since our country was attacked, the men and women of our Armed Forces have engaged the terrorist enemy on many fronts. They've confronted grave dangers to defend the safety of the American people. They have liberated two nations, Afghanistan and Iraq, delivering more than 50 million people from the hands of dictators. Those who serve and fight today are adding great achievements of their own to America's history. America is grateful for their daring, grateful for their honor, and grateful for their sacrifice.

On this Veterans Day, with our Nation at war, Americans are deeply aware of the current military struggle and of recent sacrifice. Young Americans have died in liberating Iraq and Afghanistan. They've died in securing freedom in those countries. The loss is terrible. It is borne especially by the families left behind. But in their hurt and in their loneliness, I want these families to know your loved ones served in a good and just cause. They died in distant lands to fight terror, to advance freedom, and to protect America. They did not live to be called veterans, but this Nation will never forget their lives of service and all they did for us.

At this hour, many thousands are following their duty at great risk. One young man serving in Iraq recently said this: "We in the military signed up and pledged to protect this great country of ours from enemies foreign and domestic." "We're fighting," he said, "so that the next generation might never have to experience anything like September the 11th, 2001."

Today and every day, the prayers of the American people are with those who wear our country's uniform. They serve a great cause and they follow a great tradition, handed down to them by America's veterans. Our veterans from every era are the finest of citizens. We owe them the life we know today. They command the respect of the American people, and they have our lasting gratitude.

Thank you for coming today. May God bless America, and may God bless all who defend it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:38 a.m. at Arlington National Cemetery. In his remarks, he referred to David Berger, national commander,

Army and Navy Union of the United States of America.

## **Remarks at the Heritage Foundation President's Club Luncheon**

*November 11, 2003*

Ed, thank you very much. It's an honor to be here. I appreciate your invitation. I want to thank you for your decades of leadership in the conservative movement. Presidents come and go, except here at the Heritage Foundation. [Laughter] I appreciate being with your good bride, Linda, the trustees of the Heritage, the longtime Heritage supporters, and the Ronald Reagan Fellow at Heritage, a man who is a fine leader, a fine Attorney General, Ed Meese.

It's appropriate that we gather in the building named for Ronald Reagan. The Heritage Foundation emerged as an important voice in Washington during the Reagan years. The American people gave Ronald Reagan his mandate for leadership. Yet it was the Heritage Foundation, with a book by that title, from which he drew ideas and inspiration. Ever since, in the councils of Washington, Heritage has been an advocate for free enterprise, traditional values, and the advance of liberty around the world. My administration has benefited from your good work, and so has our country. Thank you for what you do.

We meet on Veterans Day, and I know there are many veterans in this room. On behalf of the Nation, I thank you for your service to our country. The title of "veteran" is a term of great respect in America. All who served, whether for a few years or for many, have put the Nation's needs above their own. All stood ready if the order came to risk everything for their country's cause. Our wars have taken from us some of our finest citizens and every hour of the lifetimes they had hoped to live. And the courage of our military has given us every hour we live in freedom.

In every generation, members of the Armed Forces have been loyal to one another and faithful to the ideals of America. After the Second World War, returning veterans often said they had just been doing their jobs,